

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 1095
AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS
IN CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS**

Co-chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Currey, Ranking Members Representative McCarty and Representative Berthel, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is stephanie lomangino, and I am a current resident of Bloomfield, CT. I also am the creator of the free child project, a local effort that aims to raise awareness about the harms of the family policing system – also known as the child welfare system – in our state.

I am writing to express my support for S.B. 1095, AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IN CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS. All children deserve to feel safe, secure, and supported in their places of learning. Yet too often our schools rely on policing to keep children in line, rather than funding professionals trained to deliver students necessary developmental and behavioral health resources.

I support this legislation for two reasons.

First, as a native of New Britain, CT, and a product of the public school system, I have directly experienced the harms that school resource officers have on a school environment. As a teenager, I can recount more experiences of watching police and police-like figures regularly intervene than I can the number of social workers or school counselors that I knew about or had access to. In a time where so many children are facing issues that could affect their development – whether it be their own mental or behavioral health or familial challenges – we should be investing in supports that can ensure healthy development.

Second, research has [consistently demonstrated](#) that school resource officers (SROs) are an expensive, ineffective way to support children. According to research by Connecticut Voices for Children, there is no evidence SROs make students or staff safer, but schools with SROs have more arrests and more expulsions than their peer institutions without SROs. SROs are a clear tool to funnel Black and brown youth into the prison system.

In addition, many youth who become involved in the juvenile justice system also have dual-system involvement with child welfare services. In a [study of juvenile justice involvement](#) in three states (Illinois, Ohio, and New York), the prevalence of dual-system youth in each location was 45 percent, 69 percent, and 70 percent, respectively.

If there is such a stark overlap in youth who become incarcerated and youth whose families are policed, then we should question why that is. We should be making sure that youth and their families have access to more supports, not less. This legislation takes an important step in acknowledging the type of environment that can help children learn and grow, including access to consistently and appropriately trained supports. A future without police in schools also means that children and families have access to healthy food, safe and affordable housing, free health care, non-coercive therapeutic supports for mental health and substance use, and neighborhoods to live free and play in. A future with police-free schools also means that families are not policed because they are forced to live in poverty.

This legislation is a first step in addressing the harms that punitive systems cause for so many Black and brown youth in our state. Yet, it is imperative that we examine how these interconnected systems continue to [police Black and brown children and their families](#). Regardless of who is providing support in schools, whether it be a teacher, a social worker, a counselor, a psychologist, a nurse, or a paraprofessional, we must ensure that these supportive adults do not take on the role of policing, surveilling, or controlling youth. Teachers and other educators are trusted adults who should nurture children and work with families to support children's healthy development.

Lastly, when thinking about how a restorative or transformative justice framework can be used in schools, this legislation should further create a clear definition of what this might look like. Drawing from disability justice organizer Mia Mingus' [framework of transformative justice](#), it would be important to ask these questions to transform and address harm and conflict in schools:

- What kinds of community infrastructure can we create to support more safety, transparency, sustainability, care and connection (e.g. a network of community safe houses that those in danger can use, an abundance of community members who are skilled at leading interventions to violence)?
- What are the skills we need to be able to prevent, respond to, heal from, and take accountability for harmful, violent and abusive behaviors?
- What do survivors and people who have caused harm need?
- Why do survivors and people who have caused harm have so few options in our community?
- What are some of the harmful ways that we treat each other that help set the stage for violence and abuse, and how can we change this?

We have a collective responsibility to make sure all children can feel safe and supported at school. I strongly support S.B. 1095. I hope the committee and Connecticut lawmakers will vote in favor of this bill. Together, we can build an educational system that centers the social-emotional well-being of students through care, resources, learning, and restoration.

Thank you for reading my written testimony. I can be reached at thefreechildproject@gmail.com with any follow-up questions.

sincerely,

stephanie lomangino

stephanie lomangino (they/she)
creator, the free child project